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AIRGRAM

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HANDLING INDICATOR
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A-517 NO. UNCLASSIFIED

TO : Department of State WASHINGTON

INFO : GÖTEBORG, MOSCOW, HELSINKI

FROM : Amembassy STOCKHOLM DATE: December 7, 1962

SUBJECT: Latvian Seaman Defector Talks on TV

REF :

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SUMMARY

A 22-year-old Latvian seaman, Maris KRUSTS, was granted political asylum by the Swedish authorities on December 1, 1962, after having jumped ship at Göteborg on November 18. The ship remained in port for two days while the captain and representatives of the Soviet Embassy made futile attempts, in the presence of Swedish police, to persuade Krusts to change his mind. In a very outspoken press and TV interview on December 1 Krusts told how Soviet Embassy officials had tried to persuade him to return to his ship. Krusts also gave a gloomy account of present-day conditions in Latvia under Soviet rule. The following details are collected from newspaper stories published in Sweden.

End SUMMARY

The Soviet tanker "ORGE", of 2,000 tons d.w., had carried Russian oil to the Swedish inland lake port of Kristinehamn and then sailed down the Göta River to Göteborg where she made a 20-minute stop on November 18 to clear out. It was then that a Latvian seaman, 22-year-old Maris Krusts took his long-awaited chance, jumped down on the dock and ran a considerable distance to a harbor guard's box. There he asked to be taken to police headquarters, where he claimed the status of political refugee and asked for asylum.

Apparently his escape had passed unnoticed, for the "ORGE" left Göteborg on schedule, only to return four hours later, in the afternoon of November 18, after the ship's officers had found him to be missing. The captain and another officer, presumably the ship's political commissar, went ashore, called at the police station and demanded that the fugitive be handed over. When this request was denied, the Russians returned to their ship, which remained in port.

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RMR: No action file WE BWA 12/13/62

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Clearances:

The following day two representatives of the Soviet Embassy in Stockholm arrived in Göteborg and asked permission to have a talk with the seaman in company with the ship's master and the other ship's officer. This permission was granted, and in the presence of a Swedish Police Commissioner and an interpreter the Russians made frantic but futile attempts to talk the refugee into returning to his ship. The four finally had to give up and left police headquarters, where Krusts remained in custody.

The "ORGE" left Göteborg late on the evening of November 19, after almost two days' delay. The two Embassy officials remained in Göteborg, however, and the following day again asked permission to see the refugee. This time Krusts himself refused, and there was no more contact between him and the Russians.

According to Krusts' own story as told to press and TV interviewers on December 1, in the Latvian National Foundation offices in Stockholm, the Soviet Embassy representatives in their efforts to induce him to return had applied the method of painting conditions in Sweden in black colors and as offering no prospects for him to make a living. They told him that he would deeply regret his step, since he would not be given any work or chance to complete his studies in Sweden, or for that matter, in any other Western country. They had also appealed to him by asking what his parents would say when they heard about his flight.

Krusts told the press that he had long been planning his defection, but what had directly prompted him now was a call-up for four years' service in the Red Army. Irrespective of what the Latvian youth were being taught in the schools, it was clear also to the younger generation that the Russians are an occupation power in Latvia. As a seaman he had seen much of the Western world and had come to realize that Soviet propaganda allegations did not reflect actual conditions. This had also opened his eyes in political respects.

Krusts also spoke about his own trade, saying that of the some 30 ships comprising the Latvian merchant marine, all now have overwhelmingly Russian crews. This also applies to Latvian fishing vessels, although there the Latvian portion of the crews is somewhat larger. There is a political commissar aboard every merchantman; shore leave is granted only rarely and then only in groups under the supervision of the commissar or some of his secret colleagues among the crew.

Following are other statements made by Krusts to the Swedish press:

The Russians are as unpopular as ever in Latvia, although the people there are very cautious in expressing their opinions. The attempts to divide the Latvian people, particularly the youth, continue. The youth are gathered in groups which are sent to the interior of Russia, often Siberia, to work there under the pretext of the need for practical training. Formally, the work is voluntary, but no one likes it and no one has much of a chance to escape it. To refuse would mean reprisals in some form, like being barred from higher education or from employment. The contracts, which run for several

years, include the ossibility to return to Latvia, but that is a provision on paper only and most of the young Latvians are compelled to stay in Russia. Instead Russians are being sent to Latvia.

Many thousand Latvian youngsters are members of Communist youth organizations, but they join because that is the only means for education and a decent future. They are poor and unreliable Communists. "Look at me", said Krusts, "I was also a member".

The press noted that Maris Krusts is one of the very few Latvian refugees to succeed in escaping to Sweden during the past decade, and that his defection took place by chance on the Latvian National Day.

Embassy Comment: His application for political asylum seems to have been treated with unusual speed by the Aliens Commission which only took 12 days to grant him an aliens passport and work permit here. It was also out of the ordinary that his full name was immediately released to the press and that he was given an opportunity to tell his story on the government-owned Swedish TV. His English, although heavily accented, seemed remarkably fluent for his limited formal education during his TV appearance; the press conference was conducted through a Latvian interpreter.

For the Ambassador:

Stephen Winship
First Secretary of Embassy